

IN AN INSTANT

Discussion Questions

1. Do you have children? If so, how often have you entrusted them to someone else? Have you ever considered the possibility of something catastrophic happening and, if that person were faced with the dire choice, whether your children would be taken care of? How about the reverse: Would you look after a friend's child as much as your own in the face of disaster? How much do you think we should trust someone else to look after our children?
2. Consider Ann as a mother. Do you think she was a good mother? How about at the start of the story? Do you think she was too harsh when Finn got in the fender bender? How do you feel about her relationship with Oz? Do you sympathize with her?
3. Chloe followed Vance into the storm, and when she couldn't go on, he left her. How do you feel about his abandonment? Do you sympathize with his decision? If the choice was both of them dying or him leaving her so he had a chance to live, does it make sense that he did what he did? Do you think he would make a different choice if placed in a similar situation now?
4. Ann gave Finn's boots to Mo instead of Natalie. Why do you think she made that choice? How would you feel if your best friend did what Ann did—chose someone else's child over yours?
5. Kyle fell, and Ann made the split-second decision to release the scarf that held him so she wouldn't be pulled over the edge. How do you feel about the choice she made? What if he had died—would you feel different?
6. How do you feel about Oz and the effect he had on the family? Jack admitted to sometimes feeling relieved that he was gone. Does that lessen your opinion of Jack? Consider where the Miller family might be had the accident not happened. Do you think something was saved that day as well as lost?
7. How do you feel about Kyle being a part of the accident? No one even bothered to ask him if he was okay. How much obligation do we have to a stranger?
8. After the accident, Bob was eager to help. He stepped up to do the news conference and was Ann's rock throughout the recovery. How do you feel about Bob? In your opinion, did he cross a criminal line? If so, where was that line: Sending Oz to look for Ann? Negotiating him out of his gloves for two packages of saltines? Sending Burns in the wrong direction to look for Oz to cover up his lie? How do you feel about him taking credit for Mo's survival ideas (closing up the camper with snow and melting the water)? Does it matter who got the credit? Do you think the way the story ended for Bob was just, or do you feel sorry for him, or do you think he deserved worse? Does it affect your opinion to know he did what he did to protect his wife and daughter?
9. Finn died, and the story was narrated from her omniscient view. Do you think your perception of the characters was altered because of her fly-on-the-wall perspective? If you read the story from the characters' points of view, how might your opinion of them have changed (i.e., Bob had good reason to be terrified of Oz, and you felt his fear; you understood Vance's thinking in the moment he left Chloe, his belief that the only chance for either of them was for him to get help)?

10. Would you want to witness your own funeral? How about having a view of those you left behind after you were gone?
11. The story deals a lot with death and how people cope with loss. Ann's approach was to purge the house of all remnants of Finn and Oz. Jack's was the opposite: he constantly tortured himself with their memory so as not to forget. How would you deal with such a loss? Finn didn't want the people she loved to be sad every time they thought of her. How do you think we should honor the dead? Do you think perhaps we should be happy when we think of them rather than sad?
12. Do you believe our humanity is determined more by circumstance than conscience, that if any of us is backed into a corner, our behavior will change? Do you think that in all of us there exists a base survival instinct of self-preservation that makes us capable of things we never believed ourselves capable of? Bob didn't set out that day to kill Oz or to neglect Mo. He set out to enjoy a weekend ski trip with his family and friends, and yet, because of him, Oz is dead. Oz didn't come back into the camper, and Mo didn't go after him. Is this the same as Bob's choice? And if she is not to blame for her weakness, then is Bob to blame for his? Is Ann to blame for opening her hand when she held Kyle's life in her grip? Vance left the love of his life to freeze to death alone. Karen only looked after Natalie. Natalie did nothing. Bob took Oz's gloves and sent him into the cold. Are people to be blamed for their cowardice or for being selfish because they are scared? Are we born with our strength? If so, should we condemn those who don't have it?
13. Are some lives worth more than others? If you had to choose between saving Mo or saving Oz, would the choice be a coin toss, or would other factors weigh in to the decision? How about Mo or Natalie? How about Kyle, a complete stranger, or Oz?
14. Have you ever been in a near-death situation? If so, are you proud of how you dealt with it, or do you have regrets?
15. After reading this story, do you feel differently about death, mourning, or the precious threads that tie you to this earth?
16. Who was your favorite character? Why?
17. Movie time: Who would you like to see play each part?